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ABSTRACT

The medieval study of classical rhetoric reached its zenith in the twelfth century. Rhetoric in its medieval phase can be divided into four distinct subdisciplines: "ars praedicandi," or the preaching art; "ars dictaminis," or the art of letter writing; "ars poetriae," which focused on style and developed elaborate theories of versification; and the lesser studied aspect of rhetoric as one of the liberal arts. Contrary to conventional wisdom, there were several important situations in which the rhetorical training of the educated twelfth century man could be used effectively, including discussions of policy, law, economics, and public and church politics. Deserving of study is the degree to which theologians of this period, such as Saint Thomas Aquinas, were influenced by their rhetorical training. In addition, a "divine rhetoric" has begun to be studied, focusing on the art of spiritual oratory intended to influence God. (DF)

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THE ROLE OF RHETORIC IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY RENAISSANCE

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In many ways the twelfth century was a critical formative period for the west. It has become justly known as the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, the label given it by Charles Homer Haskins.[1] Centuries, of course, are purely arbitrary units, but if we take a period of some 200 years centered on the twelfth century, we can see a series of remarkable developments which changed virtually the whole face of Europe. It was a period of tremendous expansion territorially, by clearing vast tracts of forests, by pushing into the eastern marches, by the Crusades to the Levant. It witnessed the development of towns, of commerce. In this period central administrations, both secular and clerical, took form, and law, Roman and canon, was developed into a science. In 1050 the West knew very little of Greek learning. By 1250 it had access to all of it. In 1050 there were no such things as universities. By 1250 there were several of them, distinct institutional inventions of the period. The twelfth century was truly remarkable, and my very short, inadequate list can no more than hint at the dynamism of the age. Its importance for us is that medieval study of classical rhetoric reached its zenith in this period.

Rhetoric in its medieval phase can be divided into four distinct trends or sub-disciplines. When one thinks of the middle ages, one naturally thinks of the Church, and preaching. And, indeed, the ars praedicandi is an important branch of medieval rhetoric. However, before our period

began, preaching was seldom done. Preaching became important during the twelfth century but the theoretical treatment of the sermon had only begun by the first half of the thirteenth century. So far as we know, as a separate art it played no role in the twelfth century itself.

Another branch of medieval rhetoric has become fairly well known: the ars dictaminis or art of letter writing. And indeed our period covers the major growth and developments of this art. It was closely connected with two critical advances made at the same time: the growing importance of law and the growth of central administrations. These two created a tremendous demand for secretaries to staff the new chanceries, and the dictamen teachers filled the demand.

A third branch of rhetoric became the ars poetriae. This branch focused on style, based largely on the tropes and figures in the Rhetorica ad Herennium, and developed elaborate theories of versification.

All three of these branches of medieval rhetoric have been much studied.[2] Many of the original sources have been edited and are readily available. Secondary studies abound, from summaries of each art to detailed studies of the primary practitioners.

But there is a fourth branch of medieval rhetoric which is only now getting serious scholarly attention. Rhetoric was one of the seven liberal arts. Along with grammar and dialectic it formed the trivium, the three language studies.

As such, it was covered wherever and whenever scholars studied the liberal arts. Its place among the arts might expand or contract at different times. Indeed, it is clear that by 1250 it was ignored in university education and probably at lower levels as well. But during the twelfth century, especially the first half, rhetoric as a liberal art was studied by almost every scholar of note and taught by a great many of them. It formed an important part of the higher education offered at the many cathedral schools in northern France, to which students from all over Europe flocked for the teaching to be found there.

We cannot detail the training offered in rhetoric, a task that cannot yet be attempted because the sources are not available. To determine what the instruction covered, we need access to the many commentaries written by masters on the two textbooks normally used: De Inventione and the Rhetorica ad Herennium.[3] Only now are scholars beginning to edit these commentaries. It will be years before enough are available to allow specific conclusions to be drawn about rhetorical instruction in the cathedral schools. It is clear, however, that instruction was based on De Inventione and the ad Herennium. Quintilian was used at a few schools, such as Bec, Chartres, and perhaps at Paris late in the century. De Oratore was available at many places, but apparently not used as a school text. Aristotle's Rhetoric was not even translated into Latin until the middle of the thirteenth century. For the most part, instruction was limited to reading and

commentary on de Inventione and the Rhetorica ad Herennium.

Instruction in rhetoric was widely offered, and eagerly sought by aspiring scholars early in the twelfth century. We know that Abelard studied rhetoric in Paris. John of Salisbury wrote an often quoted description of his study of rhetoric under Thierry of Chartres, one of the most outstanding scholars of his day. But John found his treatment of the subject meager and later learned more of rhetoric from a famous grammarian, Peter Helias. Thierry compiled a summary of the liberal arts, called the Heptateuchon, which included a substantial section on rhetoric. Lanfranc, the monk of Bec whom William the Conqueror made Archbishop of Canterbury, taught rhetoric. And the list could go on and on. While we do not yet know much about the specific instruction offered, the evidence is decisive in establishing that the major scholars, especially of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, thought rhetoric was an important part of the liberal arts, and spent much time and effort studying it. Many of them later taught the subject as masters.

Moreover, the library catalogues of the period that have survived establish conclusively that the rhetorical textbooks were widely available. When one considers how much effort went into the copying of a book, one must be impressed by the fact that so many libraries thought the rhetorical texts were worth the trouble.

Why was rhetoric so popular? What did arts students do with their rhetorical training? Why did they think it worth the time and effort to study rhetoric? These, I believe, are

largely overlooked questions. We know that rhetoric played an important part in the higher education of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries--and probably beyond--but seldom has anyone considered the possible uses for training in eloquence as a liberal art.

The conventional wisdom, of course, has always been that once a democratic, republican type of government is gone, rhetoric has no more vital role to play and, if it survives at all, becomes purely ornamental. As R.W. Southern expresses it, in relation to our period, "there was something unreal and futile about the exercise of an essentially practical art which had no roots in the practical life of the time."[4] Only very recently has the conventional wisdom been questioned. John O. Ward, for example, believes that "rhetorical theory continued to be of use to medieval man, in roughly its ancient dress, because he continued to be confronted by situations that required persuasion at a nontechnical level."[5] Referring to the increased interest in classical rhetoric in the twelfth century, he explains: "All study of rhetoric in medieval times was motivated by more than inertia or antiquarianism or a socio-vocational structure that paid a class of people to think, write and teach more or less what they wished to. A heightened interest in the full apparatus of classical rhetorical theory . . . suggests a crisis of communication: between king and adviser, between opposed political and religious parties or factions, between personal enemies, between educationalists with conflicting views, between conflicting professional classes and social groups,

between the bearers of Christian truth, their opponents, and the bulk of mankind."[6]

Clearly, the twelfth century did not offer the same possibilities for using rhetorical training as, say, the Roman Republic or Periclean Athens. Yet it did present men with many situations in which they needed the ability to persuade others, situations in which rhetorical training would stand them in good stead.

There is good reason to believe that the educated man of our period had an appreciation for eloquence. To take a relatively trivial, and perhaps formalized, bit of evidence, we find that "eloquent" is a typical category of praise bestowed on people. I have not made any systematic attempt to collect these attributions, but it is very common for a writer of our period, in praising a person, to refer to him as possessing eloquence, among all the other virtues listed. So we find Godfrey of Reims lauding Archdeacon Ingelrann. He lists a number of his virtues, among which is his eloquence in the courts of law.[7] John of Salisbury describes Bernard of Clairvaux as a man of the greatest eloquence, and Suger, the Abbot of St. Denis, as a learned and eloquent man.[8] Examples could easily be multiplied from the chronicles of the period. Are these merely stylized, and empty, formulas of praise? Or did an educated man of the period really appreciate eloquence in others? When we consider a number of rhetorical situations common in the period, I think we will be able to agree that the latter is the more probable explanation.

The first rhetorical situation I would like to discuss is a type of preaching campaign. This may seem to be part of the ars praedicandi, rather than an outlet for classical rhetorical training. Yet we must take a couple of factors into consideration. First, the theory of the thematic sermon dates from the early thirteenth century. The twelfth century preacher had no such theoretical training. Second, many of the preaching campaigns in the twelfth century concerned what we would today call public policy. There were evangelistic types of campaigns, to be sure. But there were also concerted and widespread attempts to persuade the populace to adopt specific political or economic policies. Training in the ars praedicandi, even when it became available, seems less applicable than training in the liberal art of rhetoric, for the thematic sermon was best designed to explicate some Biblical text.

There were several series of campaigns, which concerned what we would call foreign affairs: the preaching of the Crusades. In 1095, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II delivered an address to the people in which he called for a Crusade to recover the Holy Land from the infidel. The effect was immediate and earthshaking. In fact, with good reason this speech has been called "the most effective oration recorded in history."[9] After Urban first called for a Crusade, preachers, most notably Peter the Hermit, spread all over Europe calling on men to join the army going to Jerusalem. After this first Crusade, there were four more major Crusades during our period. Each time, they were preceded by major persuasive campaigns.

One of the Crusades, the second, was preached by no less a person than St. Bernard.

What we would think of as economic policy was also the subject for major propaganda campaigns late in the twelfth century and early in the thirteenth. Baldwin describes the efforts of many, including Robert Curcon, Eustace of Flay, possibly even Stephen Langton to combat usury by persuading the guilty to repent and restore their illegal gains.[10] Perhaps the most famous person in this attempt was Fulk of Neuilly. He has been called "the most famous and eloquent orator of his time."[11] He was very successful at converting usurers from their evil ways. Usury was, of course, condemned not merely as a crime but as a sin. We must try to keep in mind that in the medieval period faith and religion were not merely private matters but were closely connected with public policy. These preaching campaigns were directed at economic policy, not merely at explaining Scripture or edifying the people.

Besides the full scale preaching campaigns, we find fairly frequent references to speeches made to the public during our period. Arnold of Brescia, for example, held power in Rome for some time because of his eloquence. John of Salisbury reports that, as Abbot of Brescia, once "the Bishop was absent on a short visit to Rome," and Arnold "so swayed the minds of the citizens that they would scarcely open their gates to the Bishop on his return."[12] Arnold frequently addressed the people at public gatherings, often denouncing the cardinals of the Church.

Sometimes even a thematic sermon could be used to defend

policy. We have the sermon preached by Stephen Langton at London shortly after he had absolved King John from excommunication. He spoke to a great assembly of clergy and barons. While the sermon follows the thematic rules, Stephen developed it in a way to justify to a largely hostile audience the Church's policy during the preceding years of conflict.[13]

The chronicles of the period contain numerous speeches in many different situations. I have isolated one genre from then, the battle orations, of which there are numerous examples.[14] Presumably most of the speeches as reported in the chronicles are not transcripts of actual speeches but are the rhetorical products of the historians. But surely real speeches were often given in the situations the historians describe.

We also find a number of disputations that were not merely on fine points of learning, of interest only to masters and students. We find some disputations on matters of major concern to public opinion. For example, after the murder of Thomas Becket, "a controversy arose over whether the archbishop was a traitor to his country or a martyr for the liberties of the church. This issue was debated at Paris between a certain Master Roger, who accused Becket of the former charge, and Master Peter the Chanter, who defended his reputation as a saint."[15] One's opinion on this question, of course, had serious political implications.

Also having political implications was the question whether a church could sell offices without being guilty of simony. Peter the Chanter reported that the issue had been

debated at Reims before a huge assembly of prelates.[16]

With these two disputed questions, we are on the periphery of the great controversy which shook Europe during our period over the relations between church and state. The focus of the struggle is known as the Investiture Controversy, and it provided great opportunities for rhetors on both sides to use their talents. The issue revolved around the question, who can control the appointment of bishops, abbots and other high church officials? This also raised the question of the superiority of the pope over the emperor. The whole matter burst into a bitter fight between Pope Gregory VII and the Emperor Henry IV. Their conflict "stimulated an unprecedented outburst of polemical pamphleteering, a new departure in the medieval tradition of political thought."[17] These medieval propaganda efforts occupy three substantial volumes of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica.[18] As with any attempt to mold public opinion, they range from serious, well thought out, closely reasoned analyses of the issues to scurrilous attacks on the character of the opponents.

The most spectacular parts of the struggle were the attempts by Gregory and Henry to depose each other and support their rivals for office. But at a more fundamental level, Gregory and his reform party had to wage a concerted persuasive campaign to alter prevailing opinions and customs.[19]

Both sides wrote a prolific number of tracts presenting their cases. But they also circulated many letters arguing their own positions, denouncing their opponents and refuting

the latter's theories. These are not the simpler letters described in the dictamen manuals or presented in the formularies. They are political propaganda, persuasive attempts to mold public opinion. Rhetoricians on both sides had ample opportunities to practice their skills learned in the schools. Unfortunately time does not permit me to discuss any of this propaganda in detail. Suffice it to say that those three volumes of the MGH contain a wealth of material waiting for a major study of medieval use of rhetoric.

The ancient art of deliberative speaking was hardly dead in our period. Granted that political decisions were not made by town meetings. Nevertheless, major policy decisions were often made only after considerable debate, or were made corporately. We have numerous reports of speeches given in Church councils, for example. The future Gregory VII gave a speech at the Council in Rome in 1059, of which an account remains. Another was presented by him at the Lateran Council in 1078.[20] There was apparently a considerable debate which led to the foundation of Citeaux.[21] John of Salisbury describes the Council at which Bernard attacked Gilbert de la Poree. Bernard began with "a short and eloquent discourse."[22] We have a report of an "eloquent plea" of Ivo of Chartres at the Lateran Council of 1179, and of Peter the Chanter arguing his position before the cardinals.[23] The examples could easily be multiplied. Beside the major Church councils, rulers both lay and ecclesiastical would hold councils of their advisers, and surely oratorical skills were demonstrated by all those men praised for their eloquence.

It was mentioned at the outset that one of the outstanding achievements of the age was the development of law. Forensic oratory was much practised as the age could be characterized as truly as ours as suffering from "suing fever." One of the definitions of rhetoric we find in the twelfth century is "the science of pleading, that is, handling legal cases."[24] There were a series of treatises on forensic rhetoric for canon law.[25] A talented person such as Suger could make quite a reputation for himself as a brilliant pleader of cases.[26]

The medieval cases could be kept in the courts for years, their lawyers just like our appealing time after time, arguing each case before many different tribunals. The chronicles contain many accounts of these court battles. The profession of law was very attractive then as now, and equally open to suspicion of using sharp practices. Indeed, the moralists of Peter the Chanter's circle were especially concerned with their behavior. Peter charged that "just as the prostitute sets a price on her bodily members, so the lawyer sells his tongue."[27] Forensic oratory was alive, if not always well, during the twelfth century.

Thus far we have been considering situations in which the educated man of the twelfth century could use his training in the art of persuasion. Contrary to the conventional wisdom we have seen several important situations where rhetorical training could be used effectively.

I would like to discuss briefly another area in which rhetoric was used, but in a very different way. The theologians

of our period, having been trained in the arts before turning to divine science, took considerable rhetorical lore with them to use as handmaidens of theology. We know that many of the ancient Church Fathers had been rhetoricians before their conversions, and then used their rhetorical doctrines in interpreting Scripture and in theological analyses. To a lesser extent perhaps we should expect to find the same thing true of their twelfth century counterparts. Several of them even recognized that the Scriptures themselves are rhetorical.[28]

One of the best studies of the use of rhetoric in theology is Rand's little treatise on Cicero in the Courtroom of St. Thomas Aquinas.[29] He demonstrates what an important authority St. Thomas found de Inventione to be. Clearly Thomas had a firm grounding in rhetoric from his arts course, which he found useful in his theology.

Delhaye concludes that the rhetorical treatises were used by theologians primarily for their ethical content. He believes that in the twelfth and even more in the thirteenth centuries, de Inventione was a classic treatise of moral philosophy. By Thomas' time only the second book continued to be studied in the schools.[30] We need more studies of rhetorical influences on medieval theology, comparable to the ones that have been done on the Church Fathers. This should be especially interesting and significant for those theologians trained in the first half of the twelfth century, when the liberal art of rhetoric was at its peak.

Finally, let me note one fascinating use of rhetoric

which still, so far as I know, awaits a major study. Of all whose attitude matters to a rhetor, surely the most important is God. Therefore we are not surprised to find a divine rhetoric in our period. If some appeals are more effective than others with God, it would be nice to know them. One finds several references to a Rhetorica divina by William of Auvergne. This is not a mere prayer manual, but a true "rhetoric of prayer" which establishes an art of "spiritual oratory in causes and affairs of the soul."[31] Haskins refers to another such treatise by an unknown author and indicates that examples of this genre are quite rare.[32]

We have, thus, a number of important situations in which the art of persuasion could be used. Even though democracy had been long since dead, the medieval rhetor had serious uses for his training, at least in the two hundred years centered on the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century.

NOTES

1. Charles Homer Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1957)

2. See, for example, James J. Murphy, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974)

3. For a detailed analysis of the evidence for the choice of textbooks see John Bliese, "The Study of Rhetoric in the Twelfth Century," Quarterly Journal of Speech 63 (1977) 364-383.

4. R. W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 179.

5. John O. Ward, "The Commentator's Rhetoric," in Medieval Eloquence, ed. by James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 64.

6. Ward, p. 65.

7. John R. Williams, "Godfrey of Rheims, a Humanist of the Eleventh Century," Speculum 22 (1947), 33.

8. M.A. Brown, "John of Salisbury," Franciscan Studies 19 (1959), 265-6.

9. Joseph R. Strayer and Dana C. Munro, The Middle Ages: 395-1500 (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1970), p. 228.

10. John W. Baldwin, Masters, Princes and Merchants, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 20-1.

11. Milton R. Gutsch, "A Twelfth Century Preacher--Fulk of Neuilly" in The Crusades and Other Historical Essays ed. by Louis J. Paetow (New York: F.S. Crofts and Co., 1928), p. 193.

12 Brown, p. 276.

13. Georges Lacombe, "An Unpublished Document on the Great Interdict" Catholic Historical Review, N.S. 9 (1930), 408-10.

14. John Bliese, "A Rhetoric of Ultimacy: Battle Orations," paper presented at the Central States Speech Association Convention, 1978.

15. Baldwin, p. 5.

16. Baldwin, p. 176.

17. Brian Tierney, The Crisis of Church and State, 1050-1300 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 74.

18. Monumenta Germaniae Historica Libelli de Lite.

19. Walter Ullmann, The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 266.

20. Southern, p. 140.

21. Southern, p. 165.

22. Brown, p. 267.

23. Baldwin, pp. 315, 343.

24. Ward, p. 49.

25. Harry Caplan, "Classical Rhetoric and the Medieval Theory of Preaching," Classical Philology 28 (1933), 74.

26. Suger, Vie de Louis VI le Gros, ed. by Henri Waquet (Paris, 1964), p. vi.

27. Baldwin, p. 193.

28. Richard McKeon, "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages," Speculum 17 (1942), 20-1.

29. E,K. Rand, Cicero in the Courtroom of St. Thomas Aquinas (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1946)

30. Philippe Delhaye, "L'Enseignement de la Philosophie Morale au XII^{e} Siecle," Medieval Studies 11 (1949), 93.

31. Caplan, pp. 76-7.

32. Haskins, p. 138.